Teaching and Learning Matters Case Report

Overview of a co-curricular professional development program in a college of pharmacy

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ABSTRACT

The goal of a professional program at a school or college of pharmacy is to produce competent and professional pharmacy practitioners. In 2009, The American College of Clinical Pharmacy published a white paper to assist in the teaching of professionalism in schools/colleges of pharmacy to include traits such as responsibility, commitment to excellence, respect for others, honesty and integrity, and care with compassion. In February 2015, the Accreditation Council for Pharmacy Education released their updated accreditation standards (Standards 2016) which introduced the concept of co-curricular activities (Standard 12.3): experiences that complement, augment, and/or advance what is learned in the formal didactic and experiential curriculum. This article details the Professional Development Curriculum at Western University of Health Sciences (WesternU) College of Pharmacy as a potential educational model that promotes professionalism through mandating co-curricular activities for student pharmacists.

Background and purpose

The goal of a Doctor of Pharmacy (PharmD) program is to produce competent and professional pharmacy practitioners. Imparting knowledge and skills is the main focus, but that covers only part of developing pharmacists. The admission process aims to select candidates with high moral character and professional behavior; however, the burden still lies on educational institutions to transform these candidates from student pharmacists into professionals with corresponding skills, behaviors, and values, as well as starting the process of lifelong professional socialization. The acquisition of such characteristics (often referred to in health care practice as "professionalism" or "professionalization") is commonly part of a "hidden curriculum," a process that enculturates student pharmacists and instills values, habits, attitudes, paradigms, and biases—much of it transmitted unknowingly using no formal systems.[1] While the 2016 Accreditation Council for Pharmacy Education (ACPE) Standards refer to a group of activities similar to these concepts as a "co-curriculum", this terminology was not in use at the time this conceptual framework was laid down.[2]

In the context of pharmacy practice, there is a lack of uniform consensus about what exactly constitutes professionalism, leading to challenges in developing effective educational interventions that can help instill and reinforce the aspects of professionalism within student pharmacists.[1] Regardless, students acknowledge that pharmacy programs should be teaching concepts of professionalism, and they often view faculty members as appropriate conveyors and role models of professional behavior.[1] Previous conceptual

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models have been presented,[3–5] one of which was patterned after Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives.[5] Similarly, several attempts have been made to develop reliable instruments to measure professionalism among pharmacy students. These instruments measured responses from students and graduates about how much they agreed or disagreed with statements outlining professionalism as defined by the American Pharmacists Association (APhA) and the American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy (AACP), based on respondents' overall (curricular and co-curricular) experience during pharmacy school.[6–8]

ACPE Standards 2016 introduced the concept of co-curricular activities in Standard 12.3: experiences that complement, augment, and/or advance what is learned in the formal didactic and experiential curriculum.[2] In these new guidelines, colleges and schools are encouraged to develop intentional co-curricular opportunities that would deepen student pharmacists' understandings of the profession and complement their learning of the didactic and experiential curriculum. Even with these updated Standards, questions still remain for many PharmD programs on how to successfully implement and measure the effectiveness of co-curricular activities and to satisfy the ACPE standards related to professionalism.

This manuscript details the Professional Development Curriculum at Western University of Health Sciences (WesternU) College of Pharmacy as a potential educational model that promotes professionalism through mandating co-curricular activities for student pharmacists.

Educational activity and setting

In its initial iterations, the Professional Development Curriculum (PDC) at the WesternU College of Pharmacy was a combination of didactic classroom lectures followed by mandatory attendance at a designated state or national pharmacy conference. However, the general feeling amongst faculty was that lecturing was not viewed as the ideal method for instilling professionalism. In addition, attending one professional conference did not represent enough time to observe role models and to practice professionalism skills according to faculty. An analysis of the curriculum during the 2008–2009 academic year revealed the need to strengthen the curriculum in the area of professionalism development. It was recognized that a more proactive approach was needed to develop student pharmacist professionalism rather than simply relying on a "hidden curriculum" and simply attending lectures/professional meetings. Such a curriculum would need to be guided by a set of goals and objectives, and a level of accountability.

The WesternU College of Pharmacy assembled a Professionalism Task Force to develop a new framework for delivery of professional development learning for student pharmacists. The task force examined literature as well as professionalism outcomes of the ACPE Standards at the time and of current practice, and then determined the types of activities student pharmacists should participate and engage in to facilitate the gradual transition to a health care professional. Subsequently, a longitudinal PDC was formulated and approved by both the College's Curriculum Committee and its faculty. This curriculum was implemented during the 2009-10 academic year, with the Class of 2013 being the first graduating class to be held accountable for completing the requirement.

The PDC consists of five general categories: Professional Education, Patient Care Service, Legislative Advocacy, Professional Service and Leadership, and Health Care Related Community Service and Philanthropy. These five categories were determined based on published literature on developing student professionalism.[1] The categories were created to align with important traits of professionalism for pharmacists but renamed to represent different activity categories. Examples of types of activities that can be used to meet the requirements for each category as well as the requirements assigned per pharmacy school year are summarized in Table 1.

Further, the PDC is not a standalone course with course credits. Rather, it is a longitudinal, progressive curriculum encompassing required activities that can be completed throughout each year. Accountability is linked with the experiential programs (Community IPPE [P1], Health-System IPPE [P2], Advanced Elective APPE [P4]) because the administrator overseeing the program also oversees the experiential program. The PDC incorporation into the experiential courses is a yes/no factor that requires completion of the activities to progress forward, but does not contribute to the calculation of the grade.

The professional activity requirements are designed to complement the overall PharmD curriculum and align with didactic and experiential components throughout a student pharmacist's four years. These activities provide an opportunity to meet and interact with practicing pharmacists, who can then serve as role models for student pharmacists, as well as learning to interact with patients in non-traditional patient-care environments (e.g., through health fairs in which student pharmacists may take and interpret blood pressure readings, check and interpret blood sugar readings). Table 2 lists the guiding policies for the Professionalism Development Curriculum.

An educational session regarding the Professionalism Development Curriculum and how to fulfill the requirements is provided when student pharmacists enter the PharmD program, and the new syllabi (with any changes noted) are distributed annually.

Assessment methods

The activities are graded Pass/Fail based on the number and combination completed over a year. The Pass/Fail method of evaluation was chosen because the activities are typically held off-campus and span over the entire academic year. Failure to complete the professional development requirements results in a grade of "incomplete" for the associated experiential course, and a plan to correct the deficiency must be established. Failure to comply with the plan after the "Incomplete" grade is assigned results in a grade of "no credit", and the experiential education course associated with the unsatisfactory PDC activities must be repeated. Incomplete grades are negotiated on a student-by-student basis.

The list of approved activities in which student pharmacists can participate is maintained on Google Docs© for easy access by all student pharmacists and faculty. The list is updated throughout the academic year, primarily by student pharmacist leaders, as activities or events in which student pharmacists can participate are approved. The Associate Dean for Experiential and Professional